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SUBJECT: BOSNIA: SILAJDZIC VOWS TO DEFEAT U.S.-BROKERED

REFORM; TIHIC BELIEVES PASSAGE STILL POSSIBLE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DOUGLAS L. MCELHANEY, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: We met separately October 30 with outgoing Bosniak Tri-Presidency member and Party of Democratic Action (SDA) President Sulejman Tihic and Bosniak President-elect and Party for BiH (SBiH) President Haris Silajdzic. Tihic, despite eroding party discipline, still asserts SDA party unity behind the April constitutional reform package, but when pressed, admits that he would favor re-opening it to remove the provision on qualified majority (entity) voting in order to bring SBiH and weak-kneed members of his own party on board. Silajdzic is trapped in the past, complaining about how the international community has "failed Bosnia" since the war and vacillating between starting the process from scratch or tabling constitutional reform altogether until a more "appropriate" time. Silajdzic stated explicitly that if the April package is introduced to parliament in its current form, he and his party will do everything in their power to defeat it. END SUMMARY.

Tihic Says SDA Will Vote for Reforms, but Suggests Re-opening Package

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12. (C) Ambassador met outgoing Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency and Party of Democratic Action (SDA) President Sulejman Tihic to discuss SDA support for the April package of constitutional changes and next steps on getting the package passed through the new parliament. According to Tihic, at the October 27 SDA Presidency meeting, new SDA MPs expressed unanimous support for constitutional reform. He added that, although certain new representatives are ill-informed about the process and may have some reservations, no member explicitly opposes the reforms. Tihic predicted continued unanimous support for the package from his SDA, but noted he would continue to work to shore up support within the party. To this end he planned to convene an additional meeting of the SDA presidency to ensure the party's full commitment to the process. Despite these assurances, Tihic was acutely aware of his vulnerability within SDA. He continued to complain bitterly about the impact of public criticism against him by Dnevni Avaz publisher Fahrudin Radoncic. He also raised allegations that elements of the SBiH and his own SDA are being courted by unnamed sources in Middle Eastern countries to move away from a western democratic orientation.

13. (C) Turning to the position of Bosniak President-elect

and Party for BiH (SBiH) President Haris Silajdzic on constitutional reform, Tihic raised the idea of reopening the package to remove any reference to qualified majority (i.e., entity) voting. Tihic asserted that he was confident Silajdzic, based on his previous public statements, would agree to all other portions of the package if the entity voting reference was removed. Tihic indicated he would speak directly with Silajdzic to gauge his reaction to this proposal. Tihic added that he did not believe Serb parties would contest removing the entity voting language. Tihic asked that the U.S. and international community, including OHR, remain committed to the reform process, but said he was not optimistic the reforms would pass with the entity voting language. He added that it would not be politically possible to achieve passage of the amendments through the current lame-duck parliament.

Silajdzic: Entity Voting Remains a Redline  
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14. (C) The Ambassador and High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling met SBiH Bosniak President-elect Haris Silajdzic on October 30 to discuss next steps on constitutional reform. Ambassador noted that he hoped this would be the first in a series of focused discussions on the issue during which he hoped to be able to address all of Silajdzic's concerns with the April package of amendments. Silajdzic said he was eager to discuss next steps, and that he believed the U.S. should play the predominant role in leading the process. Ambassador stressed to Silajdzic Washington's keen interest in moving forward expeditiously with the April package. Schwarz-Schilling emphasized the package represented a first real step at compromise by all the parties and Bosnian politicians should not pass up the opportunity to build on this first phase. Despite his

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endorsement, the High Representative acknowledged, unhelpfully, that he and other Europeans have some reservations about what it contains.

15. (C) Silajdzic asserted that the only issue preventing him from supporting the package was qualified majority (entity) voting in the State House of Representatives. Silajdzic noted that he was not opposed to compromise, and would be prepared to make concessions on other elements of the package, but he would not relinquish his long-held opposition to entity voting. Silajdzic proceeded to deliver a monologue on how the international community had failed Bosnia since the war, citing the wartime international arms embargo against Bosnia and early privatization plans as examples where his opposition to international community policy had proved correct. He implied that the agreed package of amendments was another example of the international community supporting the wrong thing for Bosnia.

16. (C) Silajdzic went on to describe Phase I of constitutional reform as in fact "Phase II of the Serb plan to build a greater Serbia" by further entrenching Republika Srpska institutions. Guarantees of a second phase of constitutional reform meant nothing to him, Silajdzic said, because too many promises had been broken in the past. In response to the Ambassador's question on his vision for the reform process, Silajdzic said he did not have a plan to achieve a compromise among political parties. Rather, he suggested that the process be tabled until a more appropriate time. Silajdzic added that if the international community and parties that supported the April package elected to seek another vote in parliament, he would fight it all the way, and urged that the USG not insist on such a confrontation. In a clear attempt to create divisions between the Ambassador and the High Representative, Silajdzic said the U.S. had to be the key actor in any successful constitutional reform, and characterized his preference for a U.S. lead as the result of an ineffective and disorganized EU. In response, Schwarz-Schilling acknowledged EU support for the key role

played by the U.S. in this initial phase, but added that the EU intends to play a more prominent role in future phases.

17. (C) The Ambassador reminded Silajdzic that the USG has devoted much time and political capital to the issue of constitutional reform in Bosnia, and there would be little patience for abandoning the hard-won package of amendments and starting the process anew. It was incomprehensible to Washington and to Bosnia's friends in the U.S. how the Bosniak parties could oppose this package. He warned that if the Bosniaks are responsible for the defeat of this U.S.-brokered initiative, Silajdzic would be front and center as the champion of the status quo. Both the Ambassador and Schwarz-Schilling urged Silajdzic not to waste the opportunity before him and emphasized that letting more time pass before addressing the key obstacles to EU and NATO integration in the Dayton constitution would be a serious mistake.

Comment

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18. (C) Although Tihic continues to claim the USG can count on solid SDA support for the reform package, his extremely tenuous position within the party--he faces almost daily calls for his resignation--leaves him in no position to make these assurances, and SDA party discipline on the issue may be eroding. Silajdzic, for his part, is seemingly more willing to engage on the issue than before the elections. However, he clearly remains convinced he can prevail in his opposition to the package by creating divisions among the international community. End Comment.

MCELHANEY